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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the effectiveness of a 6-week school-based intervention program for children of divorce. Children's school behavior problems, attitudes and beliefs about divorce, self-concept, academic performance, and measures of group support were evaluated. Participants consisted of 127 fourth and fifth graders randomly assigned to experimental (divorce), control (divorce), and comparison (intact) groups. Teachers, parents, group leaders, and the children themselves were administered pre, post, and 4-month follow-up testing. Overall, the program children's scores did not significantly exceed those of nonprogram children across most measures, even when time since divorce was considered. However, pretesting was observed to have an effect on two child ratings at posttest and parent ratings at follow-up. The most promising findings were that the children positively perceived the group experience, and were rated as exhibiting only mild problems after the group and a moderate degree of strength. Implications of the study, limitations, and prospects for future research are discussed. References are included. (Author/TE)

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An Evaluation of an Educational Group for Children of Divorced Families

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Running Head: Children of Divorce

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the effectiveness of a six week school-based intervention program for children of divorce. Child school behavior problems, attitudes and beliefs about divorce, self-concept, academic performance, and measures of group support were evaluated. Participants consisted of 127 fourth and fifth graders randomly assigned to experimental (divorce), control (divorce), and comparison (intact) groups. Teachers, parents, group leaders and the children themselves were administered pre, post, and four month follow-up testing. Overall, program children's scores did not significantly exceed those of nonprogram children across most measures, even when time since divorce was considered. However, pretesting was observed to have an effect on two child ratings at posttest and parent ratings at follow-up. The most promising findings were that the children positively perceived the group experience, and were rated as exhibiting only mild problems after the group and a moderate degree of strength. Implications of the study, limitations, and prospects for future research are discussed.

An Evaluation of an Educational Group for Children of Divorce

In today's society many children are being affected by divorce. According to the U. S. Department of Commerce reports of population characteristics (1988a, 1988b), over 15 million children are living in one-parent homes. This number constitutes 24% of all children younger than 18 years of age. Of the children living in single-parent homes, 88% live with their mothers and the remaining 12% live with their fathers, with other relatives, and with nonrelatives.

As a result of the increasing divorce rate, it is necessary for school counselors, community mental health providers and psychologists to design effective intervention programs to help children of divorce and their families cope with the stresses resulting from the divorce experience. Robson (1982) states that as the divorce rate increases and elementary schools report increasing percentages of students living in single-parent homes or in reconstituted families, the development of preventive programs for children is essential to avoid later maladaptive patterns.

Although programs for children of divorce were a relatively new procedure in the late 1970's, the 1980's have demonstrated an increasing amount of divorce education groups being implemented in the school system (Kalter, Pickar & Lesowitz, 1984). This increase in the implementation of divorce groups is demonstrating the necessity for schools to develop ways of helping an increasing number of children cope with disruptions in their families based on the indication that divorce

will continue to increase in the United States (Cook & McBride, 1982). However, despite the fact that preventive programs for children of divorce have become more frequent in the schools, there is a lack of rigorous evaluation of these groups (Pedro-Carrol, Cowen, Hightower, & Guare, 1986). The lack of empirical program evaluations combined with the different dimensions of the divorce experience investigated, the developmental stages of the children involved, the time of data collections, and the nature of the data gathered all relate to the discrepant and confusing findings in the literature on children of divorce (Huntington, 1985).

Many researchers have reported the unfavorable results divorce may have on children. These findings acknowledge that divorce may lead to depression, lowered self-esteem, self-blame, sadness, anger and hostility toward peers and adults, fear, guilt, and anxiety in some children (Clarkson, 1980; Hetherington, 1979; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985; Wallerstein, 1984; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Other studies have found that children from divorced families perform more poorly than intact family children on a wide variety of academic and mental health related criteria, and/or several classroom behavior problems (Ellison, 1979; Guidubaldi and Perry, 1985). Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1985) reported that in the first few years following divorce, children from divorced families in comparison to children form intact families showed more antisocial, impulsive acting out disorders, more aggressions and noncompliance, more dependency, anxiety, and depression, more difficulties in social relationships, and more problem behavior in school.

Since many researchers have proposed that children of divorce are children at risk, it is easy to see why many have suggested instituting

preventive intervention programs designed to mitigate the stress and circumvent the negative psychological effects of divorce (Kurdek, 1981; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985; Pedro-Carroll, et al., 1985). Several studies suggested groups to be an effective way of providing support to children, offering information, and providing opportunities for discussion among children of divorce who may be experiencing similar concerns (Cantrell, 1986; Kurdek, 1981; Sonnenshein-Schneider & Baird, 1980; and Tedder, Scherman, & Wantz, 1987). Cantor (1977) and Hammond (1979) suggest that small group experiences provide a support system for most children of divorce and can reassure children that they are reacting naturally to the divorce experience as well as reduce their feelings of being different. Since many children feel isolated from their friends who have intact families (Hammond, 1981), the divorce group brings children together for the expressed purpose of peer-group interaction based on the group's common bonds, needs, feelings, and life experiences. This peer validation for children in the early school years is a developmental essential as well as serving to foster the therapeutic process (Sonnenshein-Schneider & Baird, 1980).

School is a natural setting for offering groups for children of divorce. One can reach a substantial number of children of divorce, there is a ready made peer group, and the children are in a familiar context (Kalter et al., 1984). According to Robson (1982), divorce groups led by elementary school counselors that focus on specific strategies to met these children's needs have proven extremely successful. Studies have demonstrated that children who have participated in school groups showed a decrease in self blame, an increase in problem solving skills (Pedro-Carroll and Cowen, 1985), and an improvement in their attitudes

toward divorce and classroom conduct (Anderson, Kinney, and Gerler, 1984).

Other studies on divorce groups for children have resulted in mixed results or failed to reach significant findings. Tedder et al (1987) found that parents rated children more socially adjusted following the group experince while teachers did not notice any change in the children. Cantor (1977) found little evidence of positive behavior change in program children, based on teacher or parent judgements.

The helping professions need to make a commitment to help children achieve a successful adjustment to their parents' divorce (Bonkowski, Bequette, & Boomhower, 1984). Kanoy and Cunningham (1984) suggest that if research in the area on children and divorce is to lead to benefits for children and their families, then we must come to an understanding of why such confusing findings are presented in the literature and improve conceptual and methodological issues. To accomplish this task, it is necessary to recognize the importance of empirically evaluating the degree to which children's divorce groups accomplish their stated program goals for a particular age group in order to assess their effectiveness. Pedro-Carrol et al. (1986) and Stolberg & Garrison (1985) have demonstrated two such examples in the research that have carried out empirical program evaluations.

The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of a current school-based divorce intervention program implemented in an Oklahoma Public School District to assist latency-aged children in adjusting to divorce. Specifically, the effects of this group on children's academic achievement, self-concept, school behavior problems, and child attitudes and beliefs about parental divorce were evaluated. Children, parents,

teachers and group leaders provided data which is analyzed and reported in the current investigation. Specifically, the following hypotheses were formulated. It is expected that participation in the group experience 1) will not significantly increase self-esteem; 2) will not significantly increase children's academic performance; 3) will significantly decrease children's school behavior problems; 4) will significantly improve children's attitudes and beliefs as well as their feelings about divorce; 5) will significantly improve children's problem-solving and coping skills; and 6) will be positively related to the measure of support children feel they have given and received from others.

METHOD

Participants

This study included 139 fourth and fifth grade boys and girls from seven schools in an Oklahoma school district. Participants were randomly assigned to available spaces in the divorce groups of six to eight members. The within school division of the total subject pool yielded an intervention group (E) of 55 children of divorce, a control group (C) of 42 children of divorce, and a comparison group (I) of 42 children from intact families in regular classrooms. Because four subjects from each group moved shortly after the study started, the data analyses were based on 51 Es, 38 Cs, and 38 Is.

Of the sample, 98.18% were Caucasian and the remaining 1.82% consisted of one Black and one Native American. Range of income per year for the divorced subgroups consists of 11.59% below $10,000, 28.98% between $10,000-$20,000, 20.29% between $20,000-$30,000, and 39.13% over $30,000. The income for the intact group consisted of 11.76% between $20,000-$30,000, and 88.23% over $30,000.

Selection of members into the experimental and control groups depended on the following factors: gender (a mixture of boys and girls) and grade level (4th and 5th grade). Time since divorce, family constellation (i.e. currently living in a single-parent family), and first time experience with divorce support groups offered in the school could not be considered as selection criteria due to school policy. However, time since divorce was taken into account in analyzing the data. The comparison group was selected randomly from the same fourth and fifth grade classrooms as the divorced participants.

Procedure

Divorce counseling groups for children in the 4th and 5th grade were publicized through elementary schools in the district. Signed parental consent forms were required for all participants. From this consenting pool, children were randomly assigned one of the three groups.

After placement of participants into groups, parents randomly selected to participate in the pretesting phase were sent the pretesting materials by way of their child's school folder, and were asked to complete and return the materials the following day. Half of the children and parents in each group completed the pre-testing phase of the experiment for the purpose of determining its impact on the participants.

Pretesting with teachers, parents, and children was completed approximately one week before the program started. Testing with children was accomplished in small groups in the child's home school. Posttesting was completed by the participants on all measures after intervention and again at the four month follow-up. The experimental children were tested in the same manner as the control and comparison group, however, these children were placed in the intervention group the following week and

continued to meet over a period of six weeks. Data were collected and analyzed at pre, post, and follow-up for all three groups.

Group Leaders

With the cooperation of teachers and administrators, the divorce groups were led by seven elementary school counselors (six females and one male) and met for weekly 30 to 45-minute sessions over a period of six weeks. Group leaders received guidelines four weeks before the groups began on student selection, running the standard group intervention program, and reporting data to the senior author. All group leaders met with the senior author to decide on the format of the groups in order to standardize the program. Furthermore, leaders had frequent meeting with the senior author while the program was in progress.

Instruments

The methods of evaluation used to assess treatment objectives included perspectives of teachers, parents, group leaders, and the children themselves. The following instruments were used to investigate the dependent variables:

Child measures - The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1969). This scale consists of 80 statements that can be marked "yes" or "no". The internal consistency coefficients for this scale range from .78 to .93, and the test-retest coefficients from .71 to .72. Concurrent validity coefficients are in the mid .60s.

Children's Beliefs about Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg, 1987). This is a 36 item objective scale in which the child can answer "yes" or "no". It contains six subscales: Peer Ridicule and Avoidance, Paternal Blame, Fear of Abandonment, Maternal Blame, Hope of

Reunification, and Self-Blame. Cronbach's alpha for the total score was .80 and test-retest relability for the total was .65.

The Child Rating Scale -CRS (Hightower, Spinell, Lotyczewski, 1987). This scale consists of 40 items tapping perceived problems and strengths. It assesses school problems in the following areas: Rule Compliance/Acting Out, Anxiety/Withdrawal, Peer Social Skills, and School Interest. Children rate all items on a three point rating scale (1= usually no, 2 = sometimes, 3 = usually yes). Cronbach's alpha reliability for the total score is .82. CRS construct validity was assessed by correlating scale scores with several criterion measures.

Child Attitudes and Self Perception -CASP (Pedro- Carroll & Cowen, 1985). A modified version of this form (Pedro-Carroll, et al., 1986) was used for this study in order to make items relevant for children from both divorced and intact homes. The modified version is a 16 item score to assess children's divorce related attitudes and self-perceptions using three point self-discipline scales. The internal consistency reliability for this measure is .73.

Comments About Group - CAG (Pedro-Carroll, et al., 1986). This is a six item posttest measure to assess children's feelings about and perceptions of the group experience. Items are rated on a four point scale (1 = very true, 4 = not true at all). The internal consistency of this scale is .64. Lower scores indicate more positive feelings about the group.

Teacher measures - Academic Achievement. This consisted of a record of the child's grade point average in reading, math, and language reported at pre, post, and follow-up testing.

Walker Problem Identification Checlist - WPBIC (Walker, 1962). This scale consisted of 50 items assessing six problem areas: Acting Out,

Withdrawal, Distractibility, Disturbed Peer Relations, Immaturity, and a Total Score Problem Behavior. Split-half reliability is .98, and criterion validity correlation is .68. Lower scores indicate better adjustment.

The Teacher-Child Rating Scale - TCRS (Hightower, et al., 1986). This is a 38 item measure which assesses seven dimensions of problem behaviors: Part I (18 items) assesses Acting Out, Shy Anxious, and Learning Problems. Scores are rated on a 5 point scale (1 = not a problem to 5 = very serious problem). Lower scores indicate better adjustment. Part II (20 items) assesses Frustration Tolerance, Assertive Social Skills, Task Orientation, and Peer Social Skills. Scores are based on teacher ratings of how well an item describes a child also rated on a 5 point severity scale (1 = not at all to 5 = very wel). Internal consistency is .91 and construct validity derived by correlating the TCRS and other criterion measures were consistently high.

Parent Measures - Demographic Information: This is a self-report questionnaire covering background history regarding family of origin, race, estimated income, marital history, years divorced, contact child has with both parents, child's living arrangements, relationship of child with siblings, birth order of child and number of siblings, whether child has received counseling services and/or parent attended parenting workshop, and did the child understand why divorce occured.

Additional instruments used with parents consisted of the WPBIC and the Parent Evaluation Form - PEF (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985). This is a 23 item scale which assesses parents views of children's school performance, peer relationships, and family relationships. Cronbach's alpha reliability is .69. Scoring is keyed so that higher scores reflect better adjustment.

Group Leader Measure - Group Leader Evaluation Form - GLEF (Pedro-Carroll, et al., 1986). This scale includes two ten item sections: one describes problems and the other competencies. Internal consistency coefficients for sections one and two were .64 and .84, respectively. Higher scores indicate better adjustment for section one, while lower scores indicate better adjustment for section two.

RESULTS

The results will be divided into two categories: Posttest data and Follow-up data. Within these two categories, the results will be organized into three broad areas. The first area will attempt to explore the effectiveness of the intervention by examining group differences on change scores. The second area will focus on pretest differences between groups to determine if children of divorce demonstrate significantly different scores than intact family children before intervention (posttest data only). Finally, as a result of the Solomon type design, the last area will examine the effect of pretesting on the posttest and/or follow-up ratings. The primary statistical tool used to test the significance of group differences were multivariate and univariate analysis.

Group Differences on Change Scores

Due to the Solomon type design utilized for this study, only half of the subjects could be analyzed using pre-post change scores since only half were pretested. Out of the 127 participants, 72 children (56.69%), 68 teachers (53.54%), and 58 parents (45.67%) completed pretests.

There were no significant differences between the three groups as rated by children on all child measures. However, written feedback from

the experimental children revealed they felt they had given and received support from other members in the group. The Comments About Group instrument reflected moderate positive child reactions to the group experience (mean = 10.83; standart deviation = 4.34; n = 48). The theoretical minimum total score is 6 (very positive) with a maximum scale score of 24 (very negative feelings about the group).

The teachers did not rate the Experimental group as being significantly different from the other two groups in the area of academics or problem behaviors at posttest. Furthermore, the parents appeared to observe no significant differences between groups in terms of behavior according to their ratings.

Finally, descriptive statistics revealed that the group leaders judged the Experimental group participants to be experiencing only mild problems (M=29.70, sd=7.25, n=50) while exhibiting a moderate degree of competencies of strengths (M=19.34, sd=8.07, n=50) on the Group Leader Evaluation Form.

The most promising findings in this section were that children of divorce positively perceived the group experience and felt supported by the group members. In addition, group leaders observed the experimental children to be exhibiting only mild problems after the group and a moderate degree of competencies.

Group Differences on Change Scores Considering Time Since Divorce

When considering time since divorce, time was divided as follows: children who had experienced divorce within the past three years, versus children whose divorce experience occured three years ago or longer. Out of the 89 children of divorce, 83.15% provided demographic information indicating number of years divorced. There were no significant MANOVA

differences between the experimental and control groups as reported by children on the child measures. Teacher and parent ratings failed to reach significance as well. Teachers did not rate children who had experienced divorce within the past three years as performing significantly lower academically or exhibiting more behavioral problems than children who had experienced divorce three years or longer. Parent ratings reflected the teachers behavioral ratings, indicated that children more recently involved in the divorce experience were not rated as exhibiting more behavioral problems than children who experienced the divorce some time ago.

Group Differences at Pretesting

Due to the design of this study, only half of the subjects were given pretests, creating smaller n's for these analyses. Children of divorce did not exhibit significantly lower adjustment scores than peers from intact families before intervention on measures of child perceived problems and strengths, beliefs about divorce, family related attitudes and self perceptions, or feelings of self-esteem. Teachers did not rate the experimental and control children of divorce as performing statistically different form the intact family children in the area of academics or problem behaviors. Divorced parents indicated they observed no significant differences between their children's behavior as compared to parent ratings of the intact family children. The overall picture at the pretest stage was one in which all three groups were functioning equally well on the specified variables according to teacher, parent and child ratings.

Analysis of Solomon Design.

The analyses of the Solomon type design revealed one significant overall effect for the MANOVA ($p < .05$). This finding was primarily a result of the scores obtained on the Child Attitude and Self-Perception Scale (CASP). Comparison of mean CASP total scores at post for E ($M=38.84$, $SD=6.25$),C ($M=36.60$, $SD=7.46$), and I ($M=41.45$, $SD=5.57$) groups yielded a significant ANOVA [$F(2,119)=5.28$, $p<.007$]. Ryan's individual comparisom method revealed that intact family children (I) rated themselves as having significantly better adjusted family related attitudes and self-perception scores than the divorced control children (C), but did not differ significantly form the divorced experimental children (E). Aside from the CASP finding, there were no significant group or interaction effects observed on children's ratings.

There were overall significant pretest effects on some measures indicating that pretesting was producing a practice effect for some ratings. These ratings consisted of the Child Rating Scale (CRS) [$F(4,118)=2.54$, $p<.05$] and the Piers-Harris [$F(1,120)=10.16$, $p<.002$].

The overall MANOVA pretest effect on the CRS was primarily produced by the Peer Social Skills (PSS) and the School Interest (SI) factor scale scores. The significant pretesting effect on the PSS scale resulted in an $F(1,121)$ of 5.56, $p<.02$ while the SI scale resulted in an $F(1,121)$ of 5.42, $p < .03$. It can be seen that pretesting did have a practice effect in which the groups receiving the pretest exhibited higher posttest performance scores than those not receiving the pretest on ratings of child perceived problems and strengths and self-esteem.
Teacher and parent ratings failed to reach significance for pretest effects in the area of academics or problem behaviors.

Follow up data

Group Differences on Change Scores

Follow-up data were collected approximately four months after the intervention groups had been terminated. There was a significant overall group effect [$F(7,46) = 2.27$, $p<.05$] for the child measures. Mean comparisons revealed that an interesting pattern emerged between the experimental and intact children in terms of their attitudes and beliefs about divorce. Intact family children exhibited more beliefs than the experimental children at follow-up that fathers would most likely contribute more to the divorce experience. The same can be seen for mothers in which the intact children rated Maternal Blame as being higher than the experimental children. The experimental group scored somewhat higher on Fear of Abandonment and Hope of Reunification than the intact family children.

Teachers rated the E and I groups as exhibiting no significant MANOVA differences in the area of academics or in problem behaviors which is consistent with posttest findings. However, there was a significant difference between groups on the WPBIC and PEF MANOVA as rated by parents [$F(6,9) = 3.96$, $p<.04$]. This was primarily a result of the Acting out scale on the WPBIC which yielded an ANOVA $F(1,14)$ of 7.96, $p<.02$. Mean comparisons revealed that the experimental parents rated their children as decreasing negative behavior significantly more from post to follow-up than the intact family group, which demonstrated increasing scores. This indicates that the experimental groups parents' believed their children's negative behavior had greatly improved, while the intact parents' viewed their children's negative behavior as slightly getting worse since the time of posttesting.

Group Differnces on Change Scores Considering Time Since Divorce

There were no significant MANOVA differences between the Es on child, teacher, or parent measures. These findings are consistent with posttesting and indicate that the length of time since the divorce experience did not cause the experimental group of divorce to be rated significantly different on the measures used in this study.

Analysis of Solomon Design

There were no significant MANOVA differences between the E and I groups as rated by children on the child measures or by teachers in the area of academic or problem behaviors. However, there was an overall significant pretest/group interaction effect on the WPBIC and PEF MANOVA as rated by parents [$F(6,12) = 7.43$, $p<.002$]. Pretesting sensitized the ratings of parents in which the groups receiving the pretest rated their children as exhibiting fewer behavioral problems at follow-up than those not receiving pretest.

Overall Summary of Results

Overall, pre, post, and follow-up comparisons of groups change over time indicated that program children's scores did not significantly exceed those of nonprogram children across measures and raters, even when considering the length of time since the divorce experience. The only exception was at follow-up where experimental parents rated their children's as improving significantly over the ratings of the intact parents.

In examining pretest differences, the overall picture at the pretest was one in which children in all three groups were functioning equally well on the specified variables according to teachers, parents, and the children themselves. In terms of pretest effects, pretesting did have an

effect on child ratings of perceived behavior problems and strengths and self-esteem at posttesting, but this finding was not substantiated at follow-up. Other child rating measures and teacher and parent ratings revealed no pretesting effects, with one exception at follow-up. Pretesting appeared to sensitize the ratings of parents at follow-up in which the groups receiving the pretest rated their children as exhibiting fewer behavioral problems at follow-up than those not receiving the pretest.

The most promising findings were that children of divorce positively perceived the group experience and felt suppported by the group members, and group leaders observed the experimental children to be exhibiting only mild problems after the group and a moderate degree of competencies.

DISCUSSION

The hypotheses that participation in the group experience would significantly decrease children's school behavior problems, and significantly improve children's attitudes and beliefs about divorce were not supported. Children of divorce, as well as teachers and parents, did not rate their school behavior problems as decreasing significantly after the intervention group, nor did they perceive their family related attitudes and beliefs about divorce as improving after intervention or at follow-up. However, at follow-up, the experimental parents did rate their children's behavior as improving significantly over the intact group. In general, these results are contrary to other studies which have found decreases in problem areas and/or attitudes and perceptions about the divorce after intervention (Anderson, Kinney & Gerler, 1984; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985; Pedro-Carroll, et al., 1986; and Thompson, 1984).

The hypotheses that participation in the group experience would not improve children's self-esteem or academic performance were supported. Children of divorce did not rate their self-esteem as improving, and teachers did not report significant changes in academic performance after intervention or at follow-up. These results support similar findings in which self-concept and academic performance (particularly math and reading scores) failed to reach significant differences for divorced and intact family children (Hammond, 1979; Kalter, et al., 1985). Perhaps the present findings suggest that familial behaviors rather than family structure affect children's self concept and academic performance. It may be that a six week group does not allow much room for academic change and may not be powerful enough to alter such a dimension as self-esteem. In fact, some studies have found that programs extending past six weels may not be long enough to produce change in self-esteem and/or academic performance (Anderson, Kinney & Gerler, 1984; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985).

There are several possible explanations for the above findings. The stated hypotheses were based on the fact that experimental children were assumed to be experiencing preprogram adjustment differences as a result of divorce, whereas their intact family counterparts were not assumed to be experiencing these differences. Contrary to expectation, adjustment differences were not observed at pretesting between groups, although a trend was observed to be in the expected direction. The lack of significant differences between groups was consistent across teacher, parent, and child ratings. This dilemma was unexpected for the most part and is inconsistent with previous studies reported in the literature (Alpert-Gillis, et al., in press; Guidubaldi, et al., 1983; Hetherington,

1979; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985; Pedro-Carroll, et al., 1986). It poses a disadvantage in ascertaining statistically significant improvement for the intervention group since all children were functioning equally well on the variables under investigation before the study began.

Children of divorce may have been as equally well adjusted as intact family children for several reasons. Children of divorce who participated in this study were volunteers selected on the basis of parental and child consent, and several parents chose not to participate or allow their children to participate in this study. The parents and children who chose to participate were perhaps better adjusted to begin with and may not have accurately reflected the problems children of divorce reportedly experience in the literature. Furthermore, the majority of divorced families had incomes totalling greater than $20,000 and only 11% were under $10,000, which may have averted some financial adjustment difficulties. Another likely explanation is that the school district utilized for this study has had ongoing children of divorce group for many years, and some children have been placed in these groups as early as first grade. The fact that the divorce groups were a normal part of the school process may have helped children of divorce feel less different from other children and contributed to their better adjustment and sufficient self-esteem. In fact, Sonnenshein-Schneider & Baird (1980) report that when a group is offered on the topic of divorce, children begin to feel divorce is not shameful and horrible.

One frequently unaddressed explanation may stem from the assumption that children of divorce usually experience problems as a result of the divorce experience. This research suggests that we should not readily assume all children of divorce will have significantly more

adjustment problems than other children. It was revealed that the children in this study may not have suffered the profound consequences of characteristics found in the literature that magnify the divorce experience, and therefore, should not be viewed together as "all children of divorce". Perhaps society, parents, and/or schools are doing a better job of addressing divorce issues with children. Furthermore, it may be that divorce in and of itself is not the significant variable, but rather, it's the consequences that ensue as a result of divorce that influence adjustment (i. e. financial resources, support systems, contact with the noncustodial parent, etc.). These findings suggest it may be time for society to change its perspective that all children of divorce suffer negative consequences and reexamine what factors are associated with divorce that cause some children to experience problems and some to be equally well adjusted as other children.

Another interesting finding of this study was the fact that the length of time since the divorce experience did not appear to make a difference in terms of how teachers, parents, or the children themselves rated the variables under study after intervention or at follow-up. Possible explanations for the lack of differences when considering time since divorce may be a result of several factors. Hetherington (1979) stated that younger children learn to cope effectively with major family changes inherent in divorce within a few years of the divorce experience. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) also describe several factors which may contribute to the intensity and duration of a child's reaction and adjustment to divorce. Some of the following factors may explain why children of divorce in this study seemed to have fared well. Most children lived in families which were not depleted of financial resources to a

significant degree. The majority of children were judged as understanding why the divorce occured, and at least one fourth of these children had received therapy to help them adjust to the divorce experience. Sibling relationships in this study were rated as being satisfactory to excellent, and almost one-fourth of the divorce group had participated in parenting classes to improve their parenting skills.

Another important feature of this study was to examine the effect pretesting might have on posttest ratings since most studies reported in the literature fail to explore this area. Although no pretesting effects were obesrved for teachers and parents at posttest, pretesting was found to effect child ratings of behavior problems strengths as well as self-esteem after intervention. Children receiving pretests exhibited higher posttest performance scores on these measures than those not receiving pretests, although this difference was not maintained at follow-up. The significant pretest effect may be a result of children simply paying closer attention to certain items brought to their awareness as a result of pretesting causing them to further explore these areas. This finding is meaningful since other studies in the literature report significant improvement in the area of child perceived problems and strengths (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985) and self esteem (Campbell, 1983) as a result of intervention when actually the measures alone may be producing the desired effects. Pretesting also appeared to sensitize the ratings of parents at follow-up in which the groups receiving the pretest rated their children as exhibiting fewer behavioral problems at follow-up than those not receiving the pretest.

There were positive reactions to the group experience from teachers, parents, group leaders, and the children themselves. The most

promising findings were that group leaders stated the expeimental children were experiencing only mild problems and a moderate degree of competencies and strengths after the group, and the children stated they positively perceived the group experience and felt supported by the group members. The top two remarks on the CAG rated by children as what they most liked about the group consisted of "The group helped me see I am not alone", and " It helped me discuss and understand my feelings about divorce". These findings support the group goals and are similar to those reported by Alpert-Gillis, et al., (in press) in which an intervention group contributed to children of divorce feeling less isolated and different, and helped children identify and express their feelings about divorce.

In terms of what children wanted to change about the group, the overwhelming response was the need for more group time and more sessions. Outside of this response, many children reported they would not change anything about the group, while some children voiced they would like more variety in activities and games. Written comments by both children and parents also revealed positive reactions to the group. These remarks are consistent with findings reported by Kalter, et al. (1984) in which parents reported comparable statements supporting the group.

In sum, this study assessed the effectiveness of a six week school-based intervention program for children of divorce. Overall, program children's scores did not significantly exceed those of nonprogram children across most measures, even when time since divorce was considered. However, pretesting was observed to have an effect on two children ratings at posttest and parent ratings at follow-up. The most promising findings were that the children of divorce positively perceived

the group experience, and were rated as exhibiting only mild problems after the group and a moderate degree of strengths.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of both clinical and research literature suggests most children experience their parents' divorce as a stressful event and exhibit short-term developmental disruptions, emotional distress, and behavior disorders (see Hetherington, 1981; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985; and Kurdek, 1983 for reviews of this literature). Although this study suggests that we should not readily assume all children of divorce have significantly more adjustment problems than other children, it is important to reexamine what factors are associated with divorce that cause some children to experience problems and others to remain well adjusted. While research is needed for these factors to be specifically determined, implications of this study suggest we can compare and investigate the types of intervention groups proving to be most effective for children of divorce at the present time who are experiencing problems and replicate them while improving conceptual and methodological problems. These findings would be extremely beneficial to all professionals, particularly those who work with children on a daily basis.

On the basis of this study and the existing literature, the following suggestions can be made to aid professionals in working with children of divorce:

1) Divorce has been shown to represent a series of stages rather than being a short-lived event (Rohrlich, et al., 1977). Therefore, group leaders should provide groups to children at all ages, preferably starting as early as possible and continuing through high school.

2) Group leaders need to be aware of how divorce affects children at different developmental stages and incorporate those issues into the group process.

3) Children are demanding more time and sessions which may be a cry for help in obtaining and incorporating fundamental program concepts. Group leaders can answer this call by expanding the length of their intervention groups past the typical six to eight weeks. Enlisting volunteers trained in delivery of these groups may help alleviate the amount of time counselors spend in group organization and delivery.

4) Group leaders can evaluate specific aspects of their groups to determine what effect their group is having on the children.

5) Group leaders can help the groups be more exciting by providing additional activities that will stimulate the children and be appropriate to the child's developmental level.

6) Group leaders can aid children of divorce by providing support for their parents and initiate and lead communication and parenting skills workshops open to all parents. If time is limited, counselors can train parent volunteers to lead these groups and provide assistance along the way.

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